

GRAMMAR

Modals

Modals are a special type of auxiliary verb. They always work with another verb.

SUBJECT + MODAL + INFINITIVE VERB (without “to”)

1. Modals do not agree with the subject, unlike other auxiliary verbs.

*I **can** go later.*

I am going later.

*He **can** go later.*

He is going later.

*They **can** go later.*

They are going later.

2. There is always a verb infinitive (without the “to”) after the modal.

*She **must** have her medicine every day.*

*You **will** be sorry for that later.*

*They **might** disagree with you.*

3. Neither the modal nor its accompanying infinitive form can use the past tense. Past tense would only be indicated by other parts of the verb phrase.

*She **might** go to the movies.*

She goes to the movies.

*She **might** have gone to the movies.*

She went to the movies.

*She **might** have gone to the movies.*

She has gone to the movies.

*She **might** have been going to the movies.*

She has been going to the movies.

4. Modals make questions by inversion.

*She **can** go.*

***Can** she go?*

*They **might** want some.*

***Might** they want some?*

*They **will** arrive soon.*

***Will** they arrive soon?*

| STRONGEST | Logical Possibility | Ability | Necessity | Permission |
|-----------|---------------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| ↑ | must | can | must | may |
| | will/would | could | should | could |
| | should | | | can |
| ↓ | may | | | |
| WEAKEST | can/could/might | | | |

Uses of Various Modals:

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| <i>Can</i> | <p>present ability -- I <i>can</i> ride a bike.</p> <p>opportunity -- She <i>can</i> help you learn to ride a bike when she is finished.</p> |
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| | permission -- <i>Can</i> I try to ride the bike now? possibility & conditional -- Anyone <i>can</i> learn to ride, if they are not afraid. request -- <i>Can</i> you teach me to ride a bike? willingness -- I <i>can</i> teach you. |
| <i>Could</i> | past ability -- I <i>could</i> ride a bike when I was younger. conditional -- He <i>could</i> learn to ride, if his father bought him a bike. possibility -- Bill <i>could</i> be a good rider with more practice. suggestion -- Mark <i>could</i> ride his bike to campus to save money. request -- <i>Could</i> I borrow your bike? |
| <i>May</i> | polite request or permission -- <i>May</i> I borrow your bike? possibility -- He <i>may</i> be able to assemble your bike tomorrow. |
| <i>Might</i> | possibility, but not certainty -- I <i>might</i> be able to buy a new bike. conditional -- If the seat is comfortable, it <i>might</i> be a good choice. suggestion -- You <i>might</i> want to lower the seat to reach the pedals. |
| <i>Must</i> | strong obligation -- You <i>must</i> return the bike in good condition. necessity -- I <i>must</i> get to the bike store before closing. |
| <i>Shall</i> | formal invitation & future action -- <i>Shall</i> we ride bikes tomorrow? <i>NOTE: British English</i> |
| <i>Should</i> | mild obligation -- You <i>should</i> follow traffic laws when riding your bike. recommendation, or advice -- You <i>should</i> wear your helmet. expectation -- He <i>should</i> finish the race around noon. |
| <i>Will</i> | future intent -- I <i>will</i> go riding on Sunday. promise -- We <i>will</i> definitely make time to ride together next week. prediction -- The weatherman reports that it <i>will</i> be too windy to bike. voluntary action -- I <i>will</i> go anyway. |
| <i>Would</i> | conditional -- I <i>would</i> ride the bike at night, if I had a headlamp. past of will -- He <i>would</i> ride his bike before he hurt his knee. |